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ABSTRACT

Descriptive data about teachers in America were analyzed in terms of the international dimension of education and the social context in which schools operate. Characteristics of teachers, such as age, gender, race, experience, education, and the conditions under which they work, provided a profile of the "typical" teacher. The model teacher emerged as an individual who is inclined toward provincialism, is monolingual, has not systematically studied other cultures, and shows little desire to teach in a multicultural context. Escalating immigration has increased the ethnic diversity of the schools and the need for teachers to broaden their understanding and knowledge of cultures and attitudes different from their own. The need has also grown for widening the international understandings and perspectives of students. A discussion is presented on the necessity of developing a school climate in which teachers and students interact in ways that deepen appreciation for cultural differences and make them aware of the ways in which critical social values and interpersonal qualities can be modeled in the schools. Recommendations are made for developing teacher education programs which will broaden the international awareness of prospective teachers. (JD)

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A Current Profile of the American Teacher: Some Implications for International Education

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In this paper we will present descriptive data about teachers in the United States and analyze those data in terms of the international dimension of education and the social context in which schools currently operate. Further, we will make several modest proposals suggesting ways that teacher educators can contribute to the improvement of international education.

The Characteristics of Teachers

Total Numbers

At the present time, there are about two and one-half million teachers employed in kindergarten through senior high school (K-12) in the United States. These teachers constitute a little more than one percent of the nation's total population.

Although there has been a precipitous decline in students enrolled in our schools in recent years, the total number of teachers has continued to increase. The number employed in our K-12 schools grew by approximately 7% during the last decade, from 2,288,000 to 2,456,000;[1] during the same years, student enrollment fell by about 15%. This growth in the number of teachers is attributable to several factors, including extended curricular offerings--often mandated legislatively, increased populations of special needs students, and the strength of the large teacher unions in resisting layoffs. Despite this overall growth, many communities have experienced very sharp reductions in their teaching force.

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Age

While teachers have commonly been portrayed in the popular literature as a "graying" or "aging" population, it is more accurate to portray the total group as entering "middlescence". Two basic age-related changes are clearly discernible when the teachers of 1980 are compared with those in this country's schools only 10 years ago. First, there are half as many teachers under 25 in the teaching force today. This is not surprising given the reductions in the teaching force largely attributable to the declining student enrollments which fall heavily on the shoulders of young teachers. In 1970, it was calculated that 17% of all teachers were under 25; at present, this figure is only about 8%. The median age of today's teacher is 37, four years below the median age in 1961.

A second important change, curiously enough, is the reduction in the proportion of older teachers in the teaching force. In 1970, almost 14% of all teachers were over 55. At the present time, this figure is closer to 8%.[2] The explanation for this probably lies in the fact that many schools have provided inducements for teachers to retire early in order to accommodate reductions in force among their teachers.

Experience

A common corollary of age is experience. The typical classroom teacher in the U.S. today has been teaching for 12 years and for 10 of these years has been in the district in which he or she is presently employed. A positive inference one can make based on these statistics is that there is a very sizable cohort of teachers who should have learned their trade very well at this point in time and who are at what could be characterized as the peak of their careers. Another interpretation is that many teachers view themselves as having reached a plateau with no real

opportunities for further growth, career enhancement, or substantial salary increases. They most likely feel frustrated and at a dead-end, rather than at the peak of their careers.

Education

In addition to being relatively experienced and generally nonmobile, teachers also have increasingly expanded the degree of formal education related to their craft. Today almost half (49.3%) of the teachers in elementary and secondary schools in the United States have a master's degree or beyond.[3] In some states, such as California, a master's degree is now required in order to gain a teaching license. This advanced level of training stands in sharp contrast to teachers of even 10 years ago. For example, in 1971 only slightly more than one-fourth (27.1%) of the teachers in our schools held an advanced degree.[4] In 1950, there were a considerable number of normal school graduates who had not completed a bachelor's degree. For all of the ferment surrounding the issue of teacher competence in this country, in terms of formal education at least, teachers have come a long way in a relatively short time.

Sex and Race

The great majority of the almost 1,200,000 public elementary teachers are women. In 1980-81, there were over 985,000 women teaching in elementary schools and approximately 200,000 men; thus, the ratio of women to men in elementary schools, historically high, remains so (about a 5 to 1 ratio). In secondary schools there is a virtually even balance between men and women with the 1980-81 estimations at 509,000 men and 488,000 women.[5] The National Education Association in its 1981 National Teacher Opinion Poll estimates that the overall percentage of men and women among teachers in K-12 schools at 68% women and 32% men.[6]

If males are underrepresented in the teaching force, minority populations are even more so. Almost 9 in 10 teachers are white. The number of blacks in the teaching force is estimated at 8.6%. The remaining minority groups are obviously very small with Hispanics constituting 1.8% of teachers in K-12 schools and American Asians and American Indians together less than 1%. There is considerable variation and racial/ethnic distribution by geographic location. Southern states have a percentage of minorities among their teachers much higher than the national average for teachers and more consistent with the percentage of minorities generally in their states (for example, Alabama (24.4%), Georgia (28%), Louisiana (34%), Mississippi (35.4%), and South Carolina (25.5%). On the other hand, the states of Iowa (.8%), Minnesota (.7%), South Dakota (.6%), and Vermont (.4%) are considerably below national norms in terms of minorities in the teaching force.[7]

Conditions of Teaching

Teachers can also be described in terms of the conditions under which they work. A common portrayal is that of the difficult conditions of teaching today; for example, the beleaguered teacher in a "blackboard jungle" inner-city school. But is this true? Just how beleaguered are teachers? Only about 11% teach in what would be characterized as the inner-core of a city and another 9% in the outer rings of our urban areas. It should also be noted that a great many of the federal categorical programs designed for the improvement of education throughout the 60's and 70's were targeted at city schools and, while these programs were hardly unqualified success stories, they did draw resources to urban schools. Almost two-thirds of our teachers teach in a suburb (31%) or a small town (33%). Another 16% of our teachers work in schools characterized as rural.[8]

Given the recent decline in student enrollments, it is not surprising that most schools appear to be of reasonable size in terms of student numbers. A typical elementary school today has about 500 students as compared with almost 600 in 1973. Middle or junior high schools tend to enroll about 700 students and senior high schools about 1200 students. Given that the decline in student enrollment to this point in time has been at the elementary level and is just now beginning to affect secondary schools, it is quite likely that secondary schools will continue to decline in size over the next decade while the numbers of students in elementary schools will grow somewhat.[9]

Conventional wisdom indicates that class size has increased substantially across the last decade, a conclusion not borne out by the data. A recent NEA survey estimates, for example, that the number of pupils in an elementary teacher's classroom in 1981 was 23 contrasted with 27 in 1973. The number of classes taught per day for the secondary teachers remains constant at 5, but the number of pupils taught is estimated to have declined modestly from 133 in 1973 to 121 in 1981.[10] Teacher-pupil ratios may now begin to edge upward again given the recent difficult economic times.

Teachers estimate that the average number of hours in their work day is between seven and eight (7.3); however, since they also estimate that they spend approximately 46 hours per week on teaching-related duties, it would appear that an additional two plus hours per day is spent on teaching responsibilities beyond daily instruction.[11]

Finally, the estimated number of days assigned to teaching in each school year is approximately 180 across the country. The average annual salary of K-12 classroom teachers is calculated at $17,209.[12] The

question of whether teacher salaries at present are potent enough to attract and retain able people in the teaching profession is one which is generating considerable debate in this country, and it appears that the concept of merit pay will finally receive serious consideration at the K-12 level.

A Normative Profile

Thus, a composite profile of the "typical" teacher in our society today, suggests that she would be between 35 and 40 years old. She would have taught for 12 years and the majority of her teaching would have been in the district in which she is currently employed. Over those years, she would have returned to her local college or university often enough to have acquired enough credits to approximate a master's degree. She would be married and the mother of two children. She would be white, not politically active, and quite conservative in social orientation. If she had a formal political affiliation, it would be with the Democratic party. She would teach in a suburban elementary school staffed largely by other women, but in all likelihood, her school principal would be a male. She would have a class of between 20-25 students. Given her after-hours responsibilities, she would put in a work week slightly longer than the typical laborer, and bring home a pay check that was slightly lower.

How about the likelihood that she would possess an "international perspective"? Our data do not permit generalizations about the international knowledge base of our modal teacher, but we know enough about her background to be somewhat skeptical of the depth and breadth of her international understanding. In many respects she is a very provincial person. She is, for example, monolingual. She was born in a small town or rural area and

attended college within 150 miles of her birthplace. She has not systematically studied other cultures and shows little desire to teach in a multicultural context.

While survey data allow this normative profile to be developed, we must underscore the considerable diversity among our teachers and schools. Our profile should in no way suggest great homogeneity across this country. Teachers come in all shapes, colors, sizes, and ages and represent a considerable spectrum as well both in terms of dedication to their craft and the ability to perform it well. Many are well aware of the need to enhance the global aspects of education and some have made considerable contributions in this arena. Likewise, they teach in situations which vary considerably. There are teachers who are confronted with classrooms composed largely of children who come from marginal economic and social environments, children who are desperate for affection and the knowledge that they are important to someone. There are teachers who are confronted daily with the fear of physical attack and the reality of verbal abuse. There are teachers who receive no continuing professional development and who work daily in environments largely antithetical to human development. There are still many teachers who have larger than reasonable classloads and less than adequate resources. On the other hand, there are teachers who work in contexts that provide quality continuing on-the-job development. There are teachers who work in a strong and positive climate with a sense of community, where there is consensus on and commitment to goals. There are teachers who are encouraged to improve, to experiment, and who are reinforced and rewarded for doing so.

Social Context of Teaching

American teachers work in a society which is undergoing major and even revolutionary shifts, several of which have great import for international education. The United States continues to attract immigrants and through that process the nation continues to change ethnically. During the 1970's, more than four million legal immigrants and refugees and perhaps as many as seven million illegal immigrants entered the U.S.[13] In 1980 alone, there were over 800,000 legal (and conservative estimates say over one million illegal) immigrants, more than twice the number who entered all other countries combined.[14] Increasingly, in all geographic regions of the United States, we find an increase in immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In addition, there is an increasingly large migration of people within the country from one geographic locale to another. Thus, our schools present a unique laboratory for social interaction for children of different races, cultures, and religions. But this laboratory places very unique demands upon teachers to understand the effects of varying cultures upon young people and their learning styles.

The U.S. Response

It is clear that each year our interdependent relationships with the rest of the world grow more profound and more complex. Yet our ability to deal with and understand those relationships has not increased substantially. The situation is perhaps most accurately assayed by the Report of the Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. This report described our understanding of world affairs as dangerously inadequate, noting that only 5% of prospective teachers appear to take any course relating to international affairs or foreign cultures as a part of their

professional preparation. The Commission also concluded that as a nation we were scandalously incompetent in foreign languages and noted the following facts:

> --Only 15% of American high school students now study a foreign language--down from 24% in 1965, and the decline continues.
>
> --Only one out of 20 public high school students studies French, German, or Russian beyond the second year. (Four years is considered a minimum prerequisite for usable language competence.)
>
> --Only 8% of American colleges and universities now require a foreign language for admission compared with 34% in 1966.[15]

It is not that we have been wholly unaware of the need for enhanced international understandings and perspectives, but where we have tried our efforts have not exactly been overhwelming successes. Siegel and Delattre reviewed the impact of federal legislation during the 1960's and 1970's which encouraged the development of curriculum packages to promote educational equality and global understandings, eliminate the isolation of minorities and advance ethnic heritage. These scholars comment as following on the effects of these programs:

> . . . organizing school programs to foster social reform creates the erroneous idea that a "quick fix" for social problems is available through the schools. It also undermines the kind of intellectual preparation necessary for making conscientious and informed judgments about personal well-being and social policy . . .
>
> The jargon of studies intended to promote social reform--"appreciation of culture and world values," "exploring human nature," "ethnic heritage programs," "global perspectives"--conceals a shallowness in the resulting curricula. It is not likely that students will come to any real understanding of human nature without studying literature and history. It's not likely that "global perspectives" will be informed if they are taught without geography and foreign languages . . . . Such studies promote nothing but uninformed and undisciplined conviction, which, even if right, has no roots in knowledge or reflection.[16]

Harsh criticism indeed and criticism, in our judgment, with a great deal of merit. Without necessarily agreeing with the "back to the basics" approach recommended by these observers, we do believe that efforts at curriculum revision have too often been conceptually limited and misguided, and we have not achieved the stated purposes we sought.

Steps Toward Improvement

In the preceding pages we have discussed the characteristics of teachers and American society as they bear on international education. The resulting picture is neither heartening nor optimistic. Simply stated, there is tremendous need for intergroup understanding, for knowing about other people's cultures. We don't understand them very well now, and, when we've tried to improve things we've frequently botched the job. Teachers who must implement an international curriculum are, by background and breeding, not likely to assert strong leadership in that direction.

What can be done, though? Are there some suggestions for improvement, some steps to take toward improving the lot of international education? Or, are teacher educators like actors in a Greek tragedy, destined to bumble along toward ultimate failure?

We think not. While the profile of teachers reveals very conservative and provincial attitudes, we must not overlook the fact that the typical teacher cares deeply about children and adolescents and is anxious to do the right thing. There is a huge reservoir of potential among the current teaching population which can be used to further the cause of international education. While we have failed in past efforts to adjust our schools to the demands of intergroup and international education, we at least recognize that serious problems exist and believe that they can be solved.

At the risk of seeming to suggest yet another "quick fix" solution to America's educational problem, we will outline three steps which, we think, are within reach of most of us and will move us in the right direction.

Try to Build a Proper School Climate

Problems with the international dimension of schooling are often attacked by trying to "do something" to teachers (make them smarter, wiser, or better informed) or by writing better materials or improving the curricula offered by the school. Important as these activities are, we believe it's time to emphasize another solution, one that examines what has been called the "ecology" of the school, the sets of interactions through which children learn to deal with others. We believe that the climate of a school can deeply affect what children are able to learn and internalize from the formal curriculum. Here we are greatly impacted by Amitai Etzioni, who writes about the need to direct attention to the school as a set of experiences as the first step toward needed reconstruction. He suggests that when we look closely at a school, we need to look beyond teachers, pupils, classroom, and curriculum. From his perspective, what must be seen is how young people are being rewarded for work well done, how self-organization and achievement becomes a source of social gratification, how students learn to be sensitive to others. He suggests that the totality of educational experiences are rule-imparted in school, and they effect most immediately character development as well as cognitive learning. Increasingly, studies which look at the ecology of the school are finding that there are fundamental differences in schools in terms of the climate or ethos which exists. Expectations for and aspirations of

students and teachers are shaped by the myriad interactions beyond formal instruction in the classroom. Etzioni writes:

> The single most important intra-school factor which affects education is not the curriculum or the teaching style, at least not as these terms are normally used, but the experiences the school generates. In many schools, perhaps as many as half these experiences are not supportive of sound character formation, mutuality, and civility. While many factors combine to account for this weakened condition of many American schools, the ego-centered mentality is probably the easiest to reverse; it is almost certainly a good place to start the reconstruction of the schools, by providing legitimation for a structure under which self-organization will be more likely to evolve . . .[17]

The ways that students and teachers are organized and interact with one another is a matter of critical importance and can either enhance or constrain cognitive development, including international understandings. As teacher educators, we cannot control or directly affect classroom climate, but we can be sure to teach our students what we know about fostering healthy interpersonal interactions. We can make them aware of the ways in which critical social values and interpersonal qualities can be modeled in schools. And we can, of course, apply this same set of considerations to the education of teachers.

Creating an "International University"

Programs of teacher education are generally no better or worse than the quality level of their parent college or university. As teacher educators, we recognize that our students need access to rich and diverse international learning experiences. We realize that a course on comparative education or a new requirement in area studies is simply not sufficient. We need to assert strong leadership within our colleges and universities to give them an international character.

But what is a university with an international character? Obviously, there are no set answers because answers depend primarily upon local circumstances. Every university, though, has the clear responsibility and the opportunity to establish a set of goals regarding the kind of place it wishes to be internationally and then to move with all due haste in that direction.

A very brief comment about our own institution will provide a good illustration. The University of Minnesota, although extremely large and complex, has no natural international flavor about it. The vast majority of its undergraduate student body is drawn from the state of Minnesota and reflects the basic ethnic heritage of that state (primarily western Europe). Almost all of the undergraduate population comes from continental United States. Very few of these students know a foreign language well enough to speak or read with fluency, very few have visited another continent, and only a small minority has studied the history, geography, or government of other nations to any depth. While several thousand international graduate students enroll at Minnesota, they are not easily or naturally integrated into the student body. Like the profile of teachers we presented earlier, the student body at Minnesota can be described as relatively provincial and without sufficient depth of understanding about other cultures.

A few years ago, the University began to examine seriously the question of what it would mean to create an international university. Out of these discussions came a set of goals which has provided the framework for our efforts since that time.

We believe the following statements characterize an international university:

° It provides faculty with opportunities to be international and comparative in their research, to be universal in the realm from which data are drawn, questions are asked, and ideas are tested.

° It provides students with a curriculum representative of ideas and examples from all of the world's knowledge, transcending cultures, ideologies, historical epochs, and national boundaries.

° It provides for the presence on campus of faculty from other countries and opportunities for our faculty to do research and to teach in institutions in other countries.

° The student body includes international students in substantial numbers, to ensure a mix of cultures and viewpoints in the enterprise of learning.

° It provides a wide range of opportunities for students, both undergraduate and graduate, to study and do research abroad.

° It enables faculty and students to cooperate across departmental and collegiate lines in carrying out international projects. International activities are organized so as to facilitate the efforts of faculty who wish to approach questions in an international, comparative, and cross-disciplinary manner.

° It values international contributions in the hiring, tenuring, promoting, and salary discussions of faculty.

° It affords faculty opportunities to gain experience and to serve with international technical assistance projects and other kinds of international work.

These goals have not been completely attained, and we do not advance the claim that an international dimension permeates our University. We can say, though, that the exercise of establishing and trying to attain these goals has been very beneficial and has greatly enhanced the University's international character.

Establishing More Defensible International Requirements for Teacher Education Students

We have postponed until last our comments on the formal curriculum necessary to achieve international education. While the formal curriculum is significant, we believe that improving the general international environment of our schools and colleges is a precondition for improvement.

We have no specific action agenda to suggest, except to advance a number of questions which we think are relevant for teacher educators to ask and try to answer. These are:

1. What is the level of international education among our teacher education students? Should we require all students to engage in the formal study of the history and development of other areas in the world?

2. What is the status of foreign language knowledge among our student body? Should we require the learning of a second language for graduation from our curricula?

3. What opportunities are available for study abroad for teacher education students? Can they, for example, study foundational social sciences in a developing country? Do they receive credit toward a degree through study abroad or in our desire to create good teachers for American schools have we ignored the possibility that that goal can be achieved in part through study abroad?

Answers to such questions will vary dependent upon time and place, but it seems to us that they are the relevant curriculum questions which need examination in virtually every teacher education institution.

More than two decades ago, Barbara Ward invented the "spaceship earth" metaphor to depict an ecological view of an international world. Her metaphor can be a very powerful one, but only if we understand and appreciate the essence of her argument, which we take to be the essential interrelationship of nations and peoples.

The profile of teachers in the United States that we have presented in this paper raises considerable doubt as to whether the typical teacher is sufficiently in command of this metaphor to make appropriate use of it and to be of very much help in developing an international dimension in formal schooling. We suspect that much the same thing can be said of teachers in most other countries. Together, we face a real and extremely significant challenge in teacher education.

Footnotes

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2. National Education Association, Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1980-81.

3. Op. Cit., Dearman and White, p. 90.

4. Op. Cit., National Education Association.

5. NEA, Status of the American Public School Teacher, p. 52.

6. NEA, Nationwide Teacher Opinion Poll 1981, p. 4.

7. Op. Cit., Dearman and White, p. 94.

8. NEA, Nationwide Teacher Opinion Poll 1981, p. 12.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. NEA, Status of the American Public School Teacher.

12. Ibid.

13. George Keller, Academic Stragegy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 13.

14. Ken Howey, Sam Yarger, Bruce Joyce, Improving Teacher Education, ATC, Washington, D.C., 1978, p. 19.

15. President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, Strength through Widsom (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1979), pp. 7, 8.

16. Judith S. Siegel and Edwin J. Delattre, "Blackboard Jumble," The New Republic, April 1981, pp. 17, 18.

17. Amitai Etzioni, Schools: Educational Experiences First - Part II, American Education, Dec. 1982, p. 2.